WHY DOES ORIGEN REFER TO THE TRINITARIAN AUTHORSHIP OF SCRIPTURE IN BOOK 4 OF *PERI ARCHON*?[1]

BY

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ABSTRACT: There are only two passages in *Peri Archon* where Origen refers to the trinitarian authorship of Scripture. Both of these passages have, however, elicited either little or misleading commentary from the literature. In this article I will show how these two trinitarian expressions play a decisive role in Origen's larger polemic against his main exegetical adversaries, the Jews and the Gnostics. At stake is the identification of the authorship of Scripture and, thus also, its resulting message.

I. *Introduction*

In the eleventh century *Codex Venetus Marcianus*, one of the oldest manuscripts of the Greek text for Origen's *Peri Archon* (PA), there is a marginal gloss which reads: περὶ τριάδος.[2] This keen annotation was inserted in the margin at PA 4.2.2 where Origen had written that the Scriptures "were composed and have come down to us from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by the will of the Father of the universe through Jesus Christ."[3] A similar expression, evidently not detected by the scribe, occurred later at PA 4.2.7

[1] Abbreviations: PA = *Peri Archon*; GK = Origen, *Vier Bücher von den Prinzipien*, ed. by H. Görgemanns and H. Karpp, 3rd ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992).

[2] The marginal gloss occurs at lines 13ff of MS B (Codex Venetus Marcianus, 47) (P. Koetschau, *Origenes. Werke. Fünfter Band. De Principiis* [ΠΕΡΙ ΑΡΧΩΝ], GCS 22/OW 5, apparatus on 308). For a description of this manuscript, cf. P. Koetschau, *Die Textüberlieferung der Bücher des Origenes gegen Celsus in den Handschriften dieses Werkes und der Philokalia. Prolegomena zu einer kritischen Ausgabe* (TU 6.1) (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1889): 117-121; J. A. Robinson, *The Philocalia of Origen* (Cambridge: CUP, 1893) xiii-xvii.

[3] ἐξ ἐπιπνοίας τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος βουλήματι τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν ὅλων διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ταύτας ἀναγεγράφθαι καὶ εἰς ἡμᾶς ἐληλυθέναι (PA 4.2.2/GK 700, 308.12-14).

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where Origen again referred to "the aim of the Spirit who, by the providence of God through the Word who was 'in the beginning with God,' (cf. Jn 1:2) enlightened the servants of the truth."[4] Both of these passages are certainly intriguing since trinitarian expressions, which ultimately could have come only *from* Scripture, are here relied upon by Origen to aid him in his account *of* Scripture.[5] Yet while scholars such as A. Zöllig, R. P. C. Hanson, R. Gögler, and K. J. Torjesen[6] have also detected these two texts, they have offered little or no comment on them. Very little insight is offered in the notes of the Simonetti/Crouzel edition of *Peri Archon* where we read: "Toute la Trinité coopère dans l'inspiration de l'Écriture comme dans toutes les oeuvres divines: le Père est l'origine, le Fils le ministre dont l'action s'opère par l'inspiration de l'Esprit Saint dans l'hagiographe."[7] More recently, H. Ziebritzki has written somewhat dismissively of these texts: "Im Kontext der Inspirationsvorstellung fallen die Zuordnungen der drei göttlichen Personen nur vage und formelhaft aus."[8] In the commentary that follows it will be my contention that the literature has overlooked the significance of these two passages, and as such, has failed to appreciate one of the circumstances in which Origen could introduce a trinitarian expression into his writings.[9]

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[4] ὁ σκοπὸς τῷ φωτίζοντι πνεύματι προνοίᾳ θεοῦ διὰ τοῦ ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν λόγου τοὺς διακόνους τῆς ἀληθείας (PA 4.2.7/GK 720, 318.9-10).

[5] References to the "Trinity" or "trinitarian inspiration" of Scripture in this article will serve as a convenient shorthand for Origen's reference to the Father, Word (or Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit's role in Scripture's inspiration at PA 4.2.2 and 4.2.7. References to the "Trinity" (τριάς) are admittedly quite rare in his extant (Greek) corpus: cf. Comm Matt 15.31/GCS 40/OW 10, 443.3; Comm Jn 6.166/GCS 10/OW 4, 142.30; 10.270/GCS 10/OW 4, 216.31.

[6] A. Zöllig, *Die Inspirationslehre des Origenes: Ein Beitrag zur Dogmengeschichte* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1902): 62; R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (Richmond: John Knox, 1959): 187; R. Gögler, *Zur Theologie des biblischen Wortes bei Origenes* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1963): 286; K. J. Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1986): 124.

[7] H. Crouzel and M. Simonetti, *Origène: Traité des Principes*, vol. 4, SC 269 (Paris: Cerf, 1980): 174, note 10.

[8] H. Ziebritzki, *Heiliger Geist und Weltseele: das Problem der dritten Hypostase bei Origenes, Plotin und ihren Vorläufern* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1994): 227. And a little later: "Aus diesen formelhaften Wendungen ist nicht mehr zu erkennen, als daß Origenes eine gewisse Rangfolge der trinitarischen Personen beim Vorgang der Inspiration angenommen hat . . ." (227).

[9] It is certainly piquant to note how so many accounts of Origen on the Trinity, when drawing upon PA, do not take these two Greek passages into consideration, preferring

II. *Commentary*

While it is notoriously difficult to plot *Peri Archon* on the map of the early church's confession of the Trinity, largely because this book survives in a late fourth century Latin translation, both of the aforementioned passages survive in the Greek—they cannot be dismissed as "Rufinisms."[10] Yet Ziebritzki's claim, that these two authentic references to the persons of the Trinity are formulaic, is misleading. If we are dealing with two *formulaic* trinitarian expressions, then we would expect such references to be widespread. But this is precisely what they are not since nowhere else in *Peri Archon* does the Greek or Latin Origen speak of the trinitarian authorship of Scripture.[11] There is, moreover, compelling evidence that Origen actually inserted the trinitarian reference purposely at PA 4.2.2. In this passage he makes two stipulations of would-be readers of Scripture, that they assent to the "κανών of the heavenly church," as well as, somewhat conspicuously, to the trinitarian inspiration of Scripture. What is striking about this additional second request is that the κανών, the ecclesiastical rule of faith,[12]

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instead passages from Rufinus' translation, a good number of which on this point are almost certainly not original. For example, cf. M. Simonetti, "Note sulla teologia trinitaria di Origene," *Vetera Christianorum* 8 (1971): 273-307; H. Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. by A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989): 181-204. The same holds for the major textbook accounts of the emergence of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity: cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1978): 128-132; F. Courth, *Trinität: in der Schrift und Patristik*, Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte II.1a (Freiburg: Herder, 1988): 93-109; B. Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church*, trans. by M. Westerhoff, ed. by A. Louth (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993), 77-87, esp. 83 where reference is only made to the role of the Holy Spirit in inspiration.

[10] Were only Rufinus' Latin translations of PA 4.2.2 and 4.2.7 to have survived (in which the trinitarian expressions are also preserved [Cf. GK 700, 308.31-32 and GK 720, 318.20-23]), they would almost certainly have aroused suspicion, given the translator's self-acknowledged penchant for translating Origen as a trinitarian theologian (cf. Rufinus, PA pref 3/GK 78, 5.11-15). However both these passages are extant in the Greek from the first chapter of the *Philocalia*, a fourth century anthology of (mostly) Origen's writings. There is little reason to suggest that these editors have tampered with Origen's text, since in the section which immediately precedes the first of our two passages and which also survives in the *Philocalia*, Origen argues at length for the inspiration of Scripture (PA 4.1.1-7) and nowhere is a reference to the trinitarian agency in inspiration to be found. It would be highly unusual for the editors to have interpolated only at PA 4.2.2 and 4.2.7.

[11] Nor am I aware of a passage anywhere else in his extant corpus where the trinitarian inspiration of Scripture is invoked.

[12] There has, admittedly, been a good deal of debate on the meaning of κανών in this passage. Whereas some scholars have in the past taken it as a reference to the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, I understand it as a reference to the rule of faith. One of

already contained an article on Scripture's inspiration in which the "Holy Spirit" alone was identified as the inspirer.[13] When Origen, then, explicitly asks this would-be exegete *also* to assent to the trinitarian authorship of Scripture, this second request bears the marks of a deliberate supplement to the rule's article on Scripture. It is as if Origen wants to leave the unmistakable impression that the Trinity, and not just the Holy Spirit as in the rule, has inspired this book. There is, in short, little commonplace about these two references to trinitarian inspiration in book 4 of *Peri Archon*.

The question, then, must be raised: what is the most plausible explanation for why Origen, amidst one of his most extended and important reflections on biblical interpretation, referred on two distinct occasions to the concurrent agency of Father, Word or Jesus Christ, and Spirit in the illumination of Scripture's authors? In the analysis that follows I will contend that his polemic against both his exegetical adversaries, the Jews and Gnostics, played a decisive role in the emergence of these two expressions.[14]

Both passages occur within a section of book 4 (beginning at PA 4.2.1 and extending to 4.3.15) in which Origen lays out some of the leading principles for the correct interpretation of Scripture, particularly of the Old Testament. This tract on biblical exegesis is also strongly colored by his critique of his exegetical adversaries—Origen opens it with a survey of how

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the strongest arguments for such an interpretation is that PA 4.2.1-2 clearly echoes Origen's preface to PA. He opens the work acknowledging that there are disputes among those who profess to follow Christ about the interpretation of the Old and New Testaments. What is needed, he posits, is the church's rule that can serve as a criterion for biblical exegesis, and he proceeds to lay out the main articles in this rule. In PA 4.2.1-2 Origen is once again coming to terms with competing interpretations of Scripture—he documents how the Jews, heretics, and *simpliciores* misread the OT. As in the preface, so here too the κανών is invoked. For an orientation to the literature and the various positions that have developed around the use of κανών in Origen's writings, this passage included, cf. H. Ohme, *Kanon ekklesiastikos: Die Bedeutung des altkirchlichen Kanonbegriffs* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998): 181-218.

[13] The relevant section of the article runs as follows: Tum deinde quod per spiritum dei scripturae conscriptae sint et sensum habeant non eum solum, qui in manifesto est, sed et alium quendam latentem quam plurimos (PA, preface 8/GK 94, 14.6-8). Also note that the article on the Holy Spirit also does not refer to the Father or Word's role in inspiration (PA, preface 4).

[14] Such a reading of PA 4.2.2 and 4.2.7 is in keeping with the polemical quality of the work as a whole. On this matter, cf. A. De Boulluec, "La place de la polémique antignostique dans le *Peri Archôn*," in *Origeniana: Premier colloque international des études origéniennes*, ed. by H. Crouzel, G. Lomiento, J. Rius-Camps (Bari: Instituto di Letteratura Cristiana Antica, 1975): 47-61, esp. 49.

three groups of readers, the Jews, those whom he calls the "heretics,"[15] and the *simpliciores*, misread Scripture. After completing this survey of his three main exegetical opponents in PA 4.2.1, Origen begins at PA 4.2.2 to offer his account of how one ought to read Scripture properly and avoid the erroneous interpretations of these groups. Here the first of his two references to the trinitarian inspiration of Scripture surfaces:

> Therefore we must show to those who believe that the sacred books are writings not from men, but that they were written and have come down to us from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by the will of the Father of the universe through Jesus Christ, what are the apparent ways [of interpretation] for those who hold to the rule of the heavenly church of Jesus Christ in accordance with the teaching transmitted by the apostles.[16]

There are several indications that Origen's reference to the trinitarian inspiration of Scripture is motivated by polemical concerns. First, it is not "God" who inspires, but rather the "Father of the universe." This statement is pointedly directed against the Gnostics. For Origen, Scripture was an instrument in the divine plan of salvation, as he explicitly says at PA 4.2.4: "Scripture has been prepared by God to be given for man's salvation."[17] But the Gnostics, as he understood them, could not attribute salvific agency to the Creator, the "Father of the universe,"[18] and thus by identifying this Father as the author of a saving document, Origen is making a claim about

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[15] Οἵ τε ἀπὸ τῶν αἱρέσεων (GK 698, 307.4). In this article I am referring to these readers in less-charged language as "Gnostics," though this is not an entirely suitable term. Origen never uses the word γνωστικοί in this manner (cf. CC 5.61/SC 147, 166.22-24 for the only reference to "Gnostics" in his extant corpus). The term "Gnostics," applied to members of second-century dualistic religious groups, some of which professed to be Christians, is a modern coinage, traceable to the beginning of the 18th century (cf. G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, s.v. γνωστικός II.B). The "Gnostics" Origen has in mind are, customarily, the trio Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides (they are often referred to together: PA 2.9.5; Hom Jer 10.5.1; Comm Matt 12.12, etc.). It should, however, be noted that their teaching can indeed be described with terms like γνῶσις (cf. Comm Jn 5.8; PA 4.2.3, etc.) and γνωστικός (cf. Comm Jn 13.98).

[16] διόπερ τοῖς πειθομένοις μὴ ἀνθρώπων εἶναι συγγράμματα τὰς ἱερὰς βίβλους, ἀλλ' ἐξ ἐπιπνοίας τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος βουλήματι τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν ὅλων διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ταύτας ἀναγεγράφθαι καὶ εἰς ἡμᾶς ἐληλυθέναι, τὰς φαινομένας ὁδοὺς ὑποδεικτέον, ἐχομένοις τοῦ κανόνος τῆς Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ κατὰ διαδοχὴν τῶν ἀποστόλων οὐρανίου ἐκκλησίας (PA 4.2.2/GK 700, 308.11-16).

[17] ἡ οἰκονομηθεῖσα ὑπὸ θεοῦ εἰς ἀνθρώπων σωτηρίαν δοθῆναι γραφή (GK 710, 313.3-4).

[18] This critique of Gnosticism is repeatedly found in PA. Cf. PA 2.4.1; 2.5.1-2; 3.1.16; 4.2.1.

the Creator that a Gnostic would not accept. Furthermore, Origen's reference to inspiration by "Jesus Christ" is striking. While the Jews may admit that the OT was inspired by the "Word," they will certainly not entertain authorship of the OT "through Jesus Christ." Finally, the κανών of the heavenly church, understood as the "ecclesiastical rule," customarily serves in Origen's theology to demarcate heretical from ecclesial exegesis,[19] and this further confirms the contention that his reference to the trinitarian inspiration of Scripture emerges from within a polemical context.

The same polemic also characterizes the wording in our second passage (PA 4.2.7). Origen writes:

> But in the first place one must point out that the Spirit, who illumined the servants of the truth (the prophets and apostles) by the providence of God through the Word who was "in the beginning with God" (cf. Jn 1:2), had as his aim. . . .[20]

Not only does illumination by the Johannine Word-made-flesh exclude the Jews, but by insisting upon the one Spirit who illumines the authors of both testaments, the "prophets and apostles," Origen is also differentiating his view of Scripture's authorship from the Gnostic position.[21]

Both passages, then, bear an anti-Gnostic and anti-Jewish imprint and can hardly be classified as vague or conventional references to trinitarian inspiration. Origen has offered a trenchant articulation of Scripture's authorship to which neither of these two groups can assent. At the same time, it is important also to emphasize that there is more to this dispute with his exegetical adversaries here in book 4 of *Peri Archon* than simply making a competing claim about Scripture's authorship. For Origen, claims about Scripture's authorship are intimately associated with expectations about Scripture's message. Authorship is firmly tied to resulting message and this is why it is not enough for the reader to find *a* message in Scripture; the reader must find the author's message. Or expressed in Origen's own language: the interpreter must strive to discern the "aim" (σκοπός)[22] or "intent" (βούλημα)[23] of Scripture's authors.

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[19] For example, cf. Origen's preface to PA.

[20] καὶ πρῶτόν γε τοῦτο ὑποδεικτέον, ὅτι ὁ σκοπὸς τῷ φωτίζοντι πνεύματι προνοίᾳ θεοῦ διὰ τοῦ "ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν λόγου" τοὺς διακόνους τῆς ἀληθείας, προφήτας καὶ ἀποστόλους . . . (PA 4.2.7/GK 720, 318.8-11).

[21] Also cf. the end of PA 4.2.9/GK 728, 322.11ff for a similar statement.

[22] Cf. PA 4.3.4/GK 740, 328.11ff. Cf. PA 4.2.7 below.

[23] Cf. Hom Jer 19.11/SC 238, 220.54; Comm Jn 10.286/GCS 10/OW 4, 219.9; CC 6.19/SC 147, 226.14; 7.29/SC 150, 80.14, etc.

This link between authorship and resulting message is explicitly made in book 4 of *Peri Archon*, indeed, in the second of our two passages. Citing PA 4.2.7 now more extensively:

> But in the first place one must point out that the Spirit, who illumined the servants of the truth (the prophets and apostles) by the providence of God through the Word who was "in the beginning with God" (cf. Jn 1:2), *had as his aim principally the unspeakable mysteries of human affairs* (by humans I now mean souls that use bodies), so that the one who can be taught, "by searching out" and giving himself "to the depths" of the meaning of the words, might become partaker of all the teachings of his counsel.[24]

Having connected the "aim" (σκοπός) of these divine authors with their saving message, Origen now elaborates the contents of this message. Given his polemical wording for Scripture's authors as already indicated above, it does not surprise that this message is not simply Christian, but also anti-Jewish and anti-Gnostic:

> And for what concerns souls, who cannot otherwise attain perfection except through the rich and wise truth concerning God, the teachings concerning God and his only-begotten Son are necessarily presented as presuppositions; of what nature the Son is, and how he is the Son of God, and what are the reasons for his descent to human flesh and his complete assumption of man. . . .[25]

The passage continues with Origen indicating how God, the Word and the Spirit addressed in Scripture the themes central to his dispute with the Gnostics: the nature of angels and demons, how differences arose between souls, a whole set of issues concerning the cosmos, including why evil is so widespread on earth.[26] "These and similar topics," Origen concludes, "were

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[24] καὶ πρῶτόν γε τοῦτο ὑποδεικτέον, ὅτι ὁ σκοπὸς τῷ φωτίζοντι πνεύματι προνοίᾳ θεοῦ διὰ τοῦ "ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν λόγου" τοὺς διακόνους τῆς ἀληθείας, προφήτας καὶ ἀποστόλους, ἦν προηγουμένως μὲν ὁ περὶ τῶν ἀπορρήτων μυστηρίων τῶν κατὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους πραγμάτων (ἀνρθώπους δὲ νῦν λέγω τὰς χρωμένας ψυχὰς σώμασιν), ἵν' ὁ δυνάμενος διδαχθῆναι "ἐρευνήσας" καὶ "τοῖς βάθεσι" τοῦ νοῦ τῶν λέξεων ἑαυτὸν ἐπιδούς, κοινωνὸς τῶν ὅλων τῆς βουλῆς αὐτοῦ γένηται δογμάτων (PA 4.2.7/GK 720, 318.8-722, 319.3).

[25] εἰς δὲ τὰ περὶ τῶν ψυχῶν, οὐκ ἄλλως δυναμένων τῆς τελειότητος τυχεῖν χωρὶς τῆς πλουσίας καὶ σοφῆς περὶ θεοῦ ἀληθείας, τὰ περὶ θεοῦ ἀναγκαίως ὡς προηγούμενα τέτακται καὶ τοῦ μονογενοῦς αὐτοῦ· ποίας ἐστὶ φύσεως, καὶ τίνα τρόπον υἱὸς τυγχάνει θεοῦ, καὶ τίνες αἱ αἰτίαι τοῦ μέχρι σαρκὸς ἀνθρωπίνης αὐτὸν καταβεβηκέναι καὶ πάντη ἄνθρωπον ἀνειληφέναι. . . . (GK 722, 319.3-9).

[26] These topics surfaced earlier in PA in an explicitly anti-Gnostic context: cf. PA 1.4-5; 1.8; 2.9, etc.

proposed by the Spirit who enlightened the souls of the holy servants of the truth."[27] There is no more powerful way for Origen to criticize the interpretations of his exegetical adversaries than to insist that they are mistaken about Scripture's authorship, for if they are wrong about its authors, then they will surely be wrong about its message.

III. *Conclusion*

In this short article I have argued that these two lists of Scripture's inspiring agents, rare for their trinitarian formulations, emerge from a particular and noteworthy set of circumstances. Both passages contribute to Origen's larger polemic against his exegetical adversaries, the Jews and Gnostics in particular, and both do so not by criticizing the particular scriptural interpretations of his opponents, but rather by issuing a more fundamental challenge to their view of Scripture itself. A trinitarian authorship allows Origen clearly to distinguish not simply his view of Scripture's authorship from that of his opponents' views, but more pressingly, to demarcate his convictions about its resulting message from theirs. The emergence of these two trinitarian expressions in book 4 of *Peri Archon* is, thus, hardly inadvertent or conventional, but rather a crucial, and until now overlooked, piece of Origen's complex critique of Gnostic and Jewish scriptural exegesis.

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[27] Τούτων δὴ καὶ τῶν παραπλησίων προκειμένων τῷ φωτίζοντι πνεύματι τὰς τῶν ἁγίων ὑπηρετῶν τῆς ἀληθείας ψυχάς (PA 4.2.8/GK 724, 320.1-2).